

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund



Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) herd © Li Zhang/Beijing Normal University



In the United States, Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) are best known as familiar circus attractions. An estimated

16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and in captivity in their homeland. Historically, captive elephants were used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Today, very few countries use captive elephants as beasts of burden, and captive elephants in many instances face problems including husbandry and care issues, disease and exploitation. The destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture and the encroachment of human development pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannahs of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild - about half of which are found

in India. With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day and each needs a "living space" of 80 square miles.

When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassavas, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are killed each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants in connection with crop raids.

Poaching - the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones - poses a serious threat as well. Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory

is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants have left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male "tusker." In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as "mukhnas." To combat these threats, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for the protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



Two female Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) Mini Nagendran/USFWS



Anti-poaching guards in India
Mini Nagendran/USFWS

The 2010 Congressional appropriation of \$2 Million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund allowed the Service to support 41 crucial elephant conservation projects within Asia, including:

- Build local capacity for Asian elephant research through a hands-on training workshop in Bhutan and develop capacity for Bhutanese and other Asian participants in non-invasive sampling techniques such as fecal DNA sampling and camera trapping, developing study design, protocols for conservation research, project implementation and data analysis, making reliable inferences of results and educational outreach.
- Estimate the Asian elephant population size and distribution, improve local capacity to protect Asian elephants and implement management activities across the Northern Plains of Cambodia.
- Conduct environmental education in local communities, expand community elephant monitoring networks to inform population studies, carry out habitat conservation and human-elephant conflict mitigation strategies and implement a community development fund for economic alternatives to reduce human elephant conflict in China.
- Identify emerging diseases and their prevalence in Asian elephants and determine their impact for future long-term conservation, assess stress levels in populations using new molecular techniques and assess morbidity and mortality in the largest Asian elephant population in Southern India.
- Strengthen protection measures by involving fringe villagers in Manas National Park in the conservation of Asian elephants. Financially support 45 volunteers to enhance protection of Asian elephants and other wildlife and their habitats at Manas National Park in Assam in India.
- Target conservation outreach on Asian elephants in the Western Ghats in India, extend conservation outreach to decision makers by holding workshops and conducting field visits aimed at providing the required exposure to target groups to effect pro-elephant conservation policies, development plans and minimize negative impacts on wild elephants and their habitats.
- Improve Asian elephant monitoring through patrolling and enforcement in Nam Pouy National Protected Area Lao PDR. Develop a system for patrolling and response to illegal activities in Nam Pouy NPA, improve the capacity of law enforcement personnel, NPA staff and local villagers, assess and adapt the patrolling system and provide training in Monitoring Information Systems (MIST).



Male Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) *walking through tea estate* Mini Nagendran/USFWS

Asian Elephant Conservation Funding from 2006 through 2010	
Total Number of Grant Proposals Received	269
Total Number of Grants Awarded	161
Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants	100%
Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress	\$8,235,405
Total Funds Distributed through Grants	\$8,038,000
Total Funds to Administration of Grants	\$457,259
Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants	\$10,163,000

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